

WASHINGTON – The U.S. House of Representatives last night passed a supplemental appropriations bill, including \$5 million to establish a U.S. consulate in Lhasa, Tibet.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) first proposed the \$5 million initiative in early April, just weeks after the Chinese government launched a crackdown on Tibetan protests and closed all Tibetan areas to foreign journalists and diplomats.

“A U.S. consulate in Tibet would ensure that we always have diplomats and journalists on the ground to keep American citizens safe and defend human rights,” said Kirk, who co-chairs the House U.S.-China Working Group.

On April 2, 2008, Congressman Kirk first raised the idea of establishing a U.S. consulate in Tibet with the Chinese Ambassador to the United States who suggested the Chinese government might be open to the move. The following day, Congressman Kirk pitched the idea to Lodi Gyari, the Special Envoy for the Dalai Lama, who fully endorsed the initiative.

The United States has no permanent diplomatic presence in Tibet. America’s closest consulate is located in Chengdu – 1,500 miles away from Lhasa. During the recent Chinese crackdown on Tibetan monks, the Tibetan Autonomous Region was sealed off to U.S. diplomats and foreign journalists. The United States had no permanent office to monitor the situation or offer refuge to U.S. citizens living in Tibet.

“In 2003, Congress passed the Tibet Policy Act into law and with it a commitment to open a U.S. diplomatic office in Lhasa,” Kirk said. “The time has come to fulfill this bipartisan pledge.”